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WASHINGTON -- The State Department has agreed to wait until January to pursue plans to sell precision-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia, after senior-ranking lawmakers said they wanted more time to review the deal.

Congress was to receive formal notification of the arms sales agreement as early as Tuesday. While members were briefed on the deal last month, the official announcement would kick off a 30-day review period during which lawmakers could move to block it.

In a private telephone call on Monday, Rep. Tom Lantos, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, asked Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to wait until next month when members will have more time to scrutinize the deal. Congress faces a packed session for the next couple of weeks, before departing for a holiday break.

Rice agreed to wait until Congress returns on Jan. 15, according to congressional aides.

While blocking foreign arms sales is rare by Congress, the Bush administration's plans to sell Saudi Arabia such sophisticated weaponry has raised eyebrows on both sides of the aisle. The Joint Direct Attack Munitions technology would lend the country's armed forces highly accurate targeting abilities that could threaten Israel, lawmakers say.

"If it falls into the wrong hands, JDAM technology could significantly harm U.S. forces in the region and undercut Israel's qualitative military edge," wrote 186 House members in a Nov. 15 letter to Bush.

The letter, spearheaded by Reps. Mark Steven Kirk, R-Ill., and Rep. Christopher Carney, D-Pa. and signed by several senior-ranking lawmakers, said any sale of the technology must come with strict conditions and be done in consultation with Israel.

A separate letter to Bush, circulated by Rep. Anthony Weiner, D-N.Y., and signed by 117 members, asked to delay notification. Weiner says he plans to introduce a resolution to block the sale; the resolution has nearly three dozen co-sponsors.

Rice announced plans to pursue the multibillion dollar military sales package for Arab nations in July. The goal of the program, estimated to be worth as much as \$20 billion, was to help secure Iraq and promote stability in the Persian Gulf, she said.

The sales were to be counterbalanced with \$30 billion in military assistance to Israel -- a more than 25 percent increase over the next 10 years, enabling the Jewish state to keep its military advantage over neighbors with whom it has no peace deal.

Israel said it understood the U.S. rationale and would not oppose the arms package.

Lantos spokeswoman Lynne Weil confirmed on Tuesday that the chairman asked the State Department to delay notification of the precision-guided munition sales "in order to give Congress a chance to exercise its prerogative and give the plan a thorough 30-day review."

Sen. Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, said Tuesday that he too had concerns about the timing of the announcement, as well as the need to share the weaponry with Saudi Arabia.

"Thus far, the justification of the sale has not been made to me," said Biden, D-Del. "Doesn't mean it can't. We need a lot more information."